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In the Spirit

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by T. Austin-Sparks

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Chapter 1 - Providing God with a Way

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice... and... I saw" (Rev. 1:10,12).

"And he came in the Spirit into the temple... and blessed God, and said, Now lettest thou thy servant depart, Lord, according to thy word, in peace; for mine eyes have seen..." (Luke 2:27-30).

"But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you" (Rom. 8:9).

Providing God with a Way

You will find this little phrase "in the Spirit" very frequently used in Scripture, and almost invariably it is connected with something that is about to happen; something is going to happen, something from heaven, something of God, a new revelation or some fresh stage in the revelation, some mighty work God is about to do and, in connection with that, a showing or a doing from heaven. It is said of the one immediately concerned, standing in relation to God for the people of God who are to come into the meaning of that divine movement, it is said of such that he was "in the Spirit".

You know how true that was in the case of John, "*I was in the Spirit... I heard... I saw.*" And John said that on several occasions, if you care to look through the Revelation, "*I was in the Spirit and I saw*." Of Ezekiel how often that was said. He, in the Spirit, was shown, was taken, was lifted up. And what a day that was when Simeon who had waited so long and had perhaps almost given up hope, feeling that the long delay would go beyond his swiftly closing days, but one morning he felt something different. Yes, he would have gone into the temple perhaps as usual. As he had gone into the temple almost countless times through a long life, he would have done it again, but that morning (he perhaps could not explain it) but he felt drawn, he felt something pending, he felt he was in a different realm from the usual, and he came into the temple in the Spirit. An ordinary day was changed into a very extraordinary day when he came in in the

Spirit.

So it is perfectly clear that, while from the side of God something may be going to happen, may be intended, may be purposed, something tremendous, something revolutionary, something that has never been before, there is the other side where those concerned either to receive or to be the channels of that work or revelation of God, where they are concerned, there is a need. It will not just happen unless they are in the Spirit. God's mighty things wait for a state, depend upon a state, where His people are concerned. They have to be, as truly as ever John or Ezekiel or Simeon or the Lord Jesus Himself of Whom the same thing is said, just as true of us as it was of them, "in the Spirit".

Now, of course, in the case of these, something transpired which may not transpire again. And I think this being in the Spirit had a fuller meaning in their case at those particular times than the ordinary being in the Spirit (if it is possible to be in the Spirit ordinarily). John was carried away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain and shown the holy city, new Jerusalem. John was in the Spirit and saw all that which he has given to us in the Revelation. So with Ezekiel, so with Simeon, in that particular connection.

But the little passage in the letter to the Romans, as one among many in the New Testament, puts us into this thing, "*Ye are... in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you.*" Ye are in the Spirit. Let me say again, everything that God has revealed, that God would do, requires that those concerned shall be in that state called "in the Spirit". What does it mean? Well, simply and briefly, it means that we are just detached in consciousness from ourselves and our fears and this world, and are awake, alive, to God. We are attuned to God, we have come right into line with God in Spirit, so alive to God, that He Who is Spirit can communicate to our spirits. But what a lot hangs upon this being in the Spirit! Revelation, coming to know, being made intelligent as to the mind and purpose of God, the way of God... our spiritual growth depends upon this. We are not going to grow except as we live in the Spirit.

Made Children of God by the Indwelling Spirit

May I say here, before we go further, that this is the basic thing which happens; making a difference between a Christian, a true child of God, and any other one. The first thing about the born anew child of God is this new consciousness of the inward government of the Spirit of God. You are not God's, you are not the

Lord's, unless the Spirit of God dwells in you. And from that moment that indwelling Spirit ought to begin to govern our consciousness so that we have an entirely new intelligence. You discriminate between people very often on the matter of intelligence. You say, he is not very intelligent or he is a very intelligent child. What do you mean? One who has taken note, who is aware, who is all alive and who is 'up to things', who knows; not all the time having to be told and outwardly directed and corrected; they know. That is the basic characteristic of a true child of God, and the growth of that intelligence is the mark of spiritual growth.

I must add this, that, while not seeking to give any doctrine on the matter as to whether this indwelling of the Spirit is something subsequent to new birth, I do not believe that there is anything in the New Testament at all that says that it is. That is, that we receive the Spirit indwelling necessarily, essentially, at some later time. It happens as to greater fulnesses or fuller marks, but it can be at the beginning. With many of us, we have gone on for years and not had this aliveness to God, this intelligence, this sense of God inwardly governing, and then something has happened. We know what happened, what was necessary to make for that happening, and we came out, as it were, from a sleep and woke up. It was not our new birth, but we did wake up, and from that time we have had an aliveness to God which we never had before. Do not resolve that into a doctrine of second blessing and so on. It is unnecessary, it can be at the beginning. Much depends upon the apprehension of the work of Christ. That is a larger matter. But whether at your new birth you knew this or do not know it yet, as a Christian you believe that you are the Lord's, let me say that this is a thing which ought to be. And you will not make very much progress and grow very much until it is so, that you really know the Lord, the Spirit, in your heart governing and telling you, not in words, but in ways very much stronger than words, what and what is not according to the mind of the Lord. Then to walk in the Spirit is something more than to have that intelligence, it is to obey that intelligence and adjust.

The Condition for Our Own Spiritual Growth

This is a matter which is going to govern our conduct. Oh, how often we gather and are conscious of the presence of the Lord and the word of the Lord, and then, less than five minutes after a gathering is over, we are talking about anything. We are right away; something is lost, something goes out, and if we are spiritually sensitive and alive to the Lord, we have a bad time, a miserable, wretched time because we allowed ourselves to be caught away in that kind of

talk and conversation and we have dissipated the Spirit. If we have a bad time like this, that is exactly as it ought to be so long as we adjust and say, 'That is not going to happen again.' It is a matter of walking in the Spirit, adjustment to spiritual consciousness and intelligence. It is the way of growth. I have spoken about conversation. It applies to anything in the matter of life and conduct, what we do or where we go. We are not going to be governed by written laws any longer. We are going to be governed by the Spirit Who wrote the laws and is now not quoting Scripture at us necessarily, but making us feel the weight of Scripture, the meaning of Scripture, and afterwards, when we check up, we find the Scripture that governs our bad time. The Holy Spirit has Scripture for everything that He says in us.

These are just pointers, firstly, a state necessary to what God is intending to do, what is going to happen. This applies to every gathering; if the Lord is going to say something it is going to be made possible because He has a people in the Spirit for it. I wonder what you say when you bow your head when you come into a gathering. I am not questioning but that it is a true lifting of heart to the Lord. Billy Bray said that the men came in and took off their hats and read "Somebody's Cork Bowler Hat", and the ladies looked down to see how their shoes looked - and that was their prayer in going into church. His point was that it was not a real touch with God; it is simply a suggestion that when we come we should seek to be in the Spirit, and that our first act in coming together should be that seeking the Lord very much that we should be attuned to His intention.

The Enemy's Opposition

Seeing how vital this is, how much hangs upon it, there will always be everything that can be against it. I am sure many of you will bear me out when I say that the one great work of the enemy is to get us out of the Spirit when the Lord is going to do something, to make us say, I was not in the Spirit for it, or to feel not in the Spirit. Sometimes we use another word - 'mood', not in the mood. Well, it is the wrong word, it is not in ourselves at all, it is in the Spirit. And the enemy has a very shrewd knowledge of anything that is at least possible of the Lord; if he does not know what the Lord is going to say and do, he has a long experience of these things and he can at least put two and two together. He senses the movements of God. He is always seeking to anticipate. He has a Herod when Christ is born. He always has his preparation to counter something of the Lord, and so it may be days ahead of something of the Lord that is coming, and the enemy tries to get us out of the Spirit, all upset, annoyed,

worried, distracted and cast down so that when the time comes we are not in the Spirit. Something has got to happen with us before the Lord can say or do what He desires. It is so real that it really does call for a terrible battle. It is so real in ourselves; it is wicked, it is simply evil. We could not find words strong enough to express this sense of diabolical wickedness in the atmosphere, it seems to get inside of us, to get us upset. We blame somebody, anything, and then the hour comes and we are out of the Spirit, and nothing but a tremendous battle will get us through. I say this to make you aware of the meaning of these things. We can put it down to circumstances, we can put it down to people. But let us remember that back of these things, more often than not, the enemy is trying to prevent us from being in the Spirit at the crucial moment.

In the Spirit in Unfavourable Circumstances

"*I was in the Spirit... and I heard... and I saw.*" With these people, all these of whom it is so spoken, things were not by any means propitious. John was in the isle of Patmos, an exile, and John might easily have said, 'Well, this place will not see very much of the Lord, not very much of the Lord here; I need to be somewhere, perhaps among His people, in a better atmosphere than this in order for there to be anything of the Lord.' Ezekiel says, "*I was among the captives by the river Chebar, (and) the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God*" (Ezek. 1:1). Simeon might well have given up in despair. He had gone on so long and nothing had happened; He might have sunk down into his own soul and become very depressed. The Lord Jesus, it says, was "*led up of the Spirit into the wilderness*" (Matt. 4:1). All the situations, the conditions, are against, and we would ask the question, "Oh, is it possible to be in the Spirit where I have to live, where my lot is cast, among the people who surround me, in the atmosphere which I have to breathe? I must wait until this phase is past and I get into my real life work or can be in closer touch with the fellowship of the Lord's people; then things will perhaps happen". No! "*I am in the Spirit*" is possible, apparently anywhere. It is not in the flesh, it is not in the world, it is not in things at all. Let us believe that and take hold of it and be in the Spirit - in Patmos, in the wilderness, among the captives far away, a despairing scene with their harps upon the willows, saying, "*How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?*" (Psa. 137:4). "*And I*", said Ezekiel, "*saw visions of God*". It is hard, I know, for you to accept that and believe it, but that is just the point. Do believe it. "*I saw in the Spirit*".

But note - "*if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you*". Ah, if that is true,

anything is possible. "*Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world*" (1 John 4:4). If He is within, He is greater than conditions, greater than the forces of evil, greater than our own souls, "*if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you, ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit*." That is our hope, that is our assurance.

The need of a condition to provide God with a way, a basis. The need of a condition for our own spiritual growth. We shall never grow unless we know what it is to be day by day in the Spirit. The Lord can speak and the Lord can do. Do not wait for a change in your surroundings and circumstances in order that you may come into the knowledge of the greater intentions of God. It has got to be where you are. Remember the great activity of the enemy is always to get us out of the Spirit, whatever that may mean to you and to me. We may wake up in the morning out of the Spirit, find everything irritating and troubling and worrying and everything to get us out of the Spirit. Remember the enemy's activity, but remember that it is not just one side, "*I was in the Spirit*". We can be in the Spirit because the Spirit is in us. There is God's side in us. But do not capitulate. Remember the battle, remember the stand that has to be made. We have to hold on, resist, until the atmosphere breaks, until the thing disperses and is gone, it is very real.

Now for every day and for every gathering, bear this in mind: the enemy will try to get us out of the Spirit. All that the Lord would do and say, so far as we are concerned, depends upon our truly being in the Spirit to hear, to see, to know. You will see what a key this is to everything. You have only to go through the book of Revelation and see what a key it is. In the end, because John was in the Spirit, he saw the final, ultimate consummate triumph of Christ and His Church; he saw all the heavenly forces of evil cast down, deposed. He was in the Spirit to enter into the good. It is not a study of prophecy, it is being "*in the Spirit*".

Chapter 2

"I John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice" (Rev. 1:9-10).

"But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you" (Rom. 8:9).

"I was in the Spirit... Ye are in the Spirit if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you".

Although in John's case the effect of being in the Spirit was particular, specific, the word from Romans indicates that the normal life of a true child of God is a life in the Spirit. We are placed there by our new birth, when born of the Spirit, when we receive the Holy Spirit. The education of the children of God lies in that very realm, and is a matter of learning from day to day, in all situations, how to abide in the Spirit, to keep in the Spirit.

Now, we know what this means by the natural. Perhaps we say, and we have heard people say: "Well, I was not in the spirit of that", or, "I was not in the spirit for that". They may use another word; they may use the word 'mood' - that is what they mean. They were not 'in tune' with the situation; they were of another and a different spirit; they were not 'at home' in the situation or in the atmosphere, or prepared for what was on hand; they were out of it, or, we were out of it.

But here it is not an 'it'. That same principle applies to our Christian life, and everything for us hangs upon whether we are, in the true sense, 'in the Spirit', or not 'in the Spirit'. That is, of course, in the Holy Spirit. Now, John said, "I was in the Spirit, and I heard...". He heard because he was 'in the Spirit'.

There are two or three simple, but very important, things that this word teaches us. And, quite clearly, in the case of John, being 'in the Spirit' represented a translation from himself and from his earthly situation. It is not a contradiction, but it is transcendent when John said, in one sentence "I was in the isle that is

called Patmos", and in the next sentence, "I was in the Spirit". All that being 'in Patmos' meant, of course, constituted a very difficult situation for him or for any man in like circumstances: isolation, exile, separation, loneliness and certain other privations; a situation that could have been most depressing, disconcerting or even devastating. That was the natural situation. John said, "I was in the Spirit. While in Patmos, I was in the Spirit". And being 'in the Spirit', as we see, meant being above his circumstances; being translated out of the earthly conditions as the final and ultimate argument in life. There was something other, something more, something different in which he could live. 'In the Spirit' he was not a prisoner in Patmos: he was free! 'In the Spirit' he was not crushed and overwhelmed by his natural circumstances: he was lifted up. Being 'in the Spirit' gives us another realm, another set of circumstances. It is a great lifting up and lifting out thing to be 'in the Spirit'.

I started by saying that this is the realm and the nature of the Christian's education: how to live and how to abide in the Spirit day by day, in the city and all that that means, in the home and what that means, where we are, whatever our 'Patmos' might be. It might be anything that is not pleasant to the flesh - "ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit if so be that the Spirit of Christ dwells in you". You have another realm, and you have another power, and another life, and another environment. And every one of us knows very well that this is true, that we have to learn how to live in our 'native air', as born-from-above children of God.

Evidently it was true with John that, while being in Patmos, he was not in Patmos. He could set over against all that, 'I was in the Spirit'.

But again, what did that mean in his case, and what does it mean in our case, to be 'in the Spirit'? What we have just said may be regarded as the negative side. We are not in the flesh; we are not in the world; we are not necessarily in the control of our circumstances or the domination of our surroundings. We are not if we are 'in the Spirit'. But there is a positive side, and we will always do well to keep on the positive side of things! With John, being 'in the Spirit' meant occupation with the Lord Jesus. You see how true that was in his case there - being occupied with Christ. This is a matter for our exercise, because it is an attitude of heart and mind. We have so much in the New Testament of this kind: 'looking off unto Jesus'. Being 'in the Spirit' will always mean this, for this is the Spirit's occupation. The occupation of the Holy Spirit, as we know, is with the Lord Jesus, from first to last, all the way through. His occupation is with the

Lord Jesus; He has come as committed to the interests of the Lord Jesus, to keep them always in view and to work concerning them. We can say that the Holy Spirit's one and all-inclusive occupation is with the Lord Jesus. And if we are in the Spirit that will be our occupation. It will be true, as in the case of Paul, 'for us to live is Christ', but it must be an attitude of heart and of mind; we must be set on the Lord Jesus.

I have no doubt whatever that on this particular 'Lord's day' John was not found occupied with the Lord Jesus for the first time; we know otherwise. It was not such a great transition from his normal occupation with the Lord Jesus to this specific encounter with the Lord Jesus. The Lord comes specifically to those whose hearts are always set upon Him. It is not a far cry from a continuous outreach of heart to Him, to some particular discovery of Him. John was always occupied with the Lord Jesus, but on this occasion there was something special about that. The latter would not have been, I think, but for the former. My point is that we must, from day to day, cultivate this attitude of heart and mind to be occupied with the Lord Jesus, and in that we shall find the Spirit with us, the Spirit on our side to help us. We do know very well, and we are very slow to learn, that we do not get very much help from the Holy Spirit, or His companionship as the One alongside when we are occupied with what is not the Lord Jesus, I mean, with what is contrary to Him. Then we get into the mire, and He leaves us there until we 'turn our eyes upon Jesus and look full into His wonderful face'.

Now, the point is again, that if Christ can be seen anywhere, in anyone, He will only be seen as we are 'in the Spirit'. If we are out of the Spirit we shall see anything but Christ, around us and in people. We can come into a gathering and there may be much of the Lord both as present in the very atmosphere, and in the Word, and in other ways, and we just miss everything because we are not 'in the Spirit'. We will be seeing people, and how things are done, and what is done, and everything like that; probably all the faults, all the weaknesses. We are not in the Spirit, and we are seeing anything but Christ even though He is there to be seen. If you and I are 'in the Spirit', if Christ can be seen in anyone, we shall see Him; if we are not 'in the Spirit' we shall see everything but Christ in one another. If He is to be seen, wherever that is, in persons, in gatherings, in things, it requires our being in the Spirit to see the Lord, and to hear Him. What are we looking for? Are we looking for those things that will confirm us in our judgments, conclusions, opinions? If we are looking for the Lord Jesus, we shall only be looking for the Lord Jesus if we are 'in the Spirit'. If He is to be seen, we shall

see Him if we are in the Spirit.

"*I was in the Spirit and I heard...*" It is always like that. What there was to hear, what there was to see, was the natural result of being 'in the Spirit'.

One other word. John, with his long Christian life of experience, service, and knowledge would never have been able to understand, to receive, or to understand all that is in this book that he wrote if he had not been 'in the Spirit'. But put that the other way; look at what is here! You know all the schools, all the teaching, all the teachers, all the interpreters. I suppose there is no book that has produced more books than this book, trying to explain it; and we seem still to be far from a perfect understanding of it. I have no doubt that John understood it all, every bit of it; he knew all that it meant. And there are some mysteries in this book. How was it that he could receive, could understand, could know? Because he was 'in the Spirit'.

Again it is this: the Holy Spirit is our capacity for understanding things that no natural man can understand. It is our comfort. The Holy Spirit is our capacity for understanding; the Holy Spirit knows it all; and the Holy Spirit in us can make us know and understand profundities and ranges that no natural mind can grasp. That is, of course, stated definitely by the apostle to the Corinthians: "*The Spirit Himself searches all thing yea, the deep things of God*"; "*The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit... the Spirit Himself has revealed them*." Here is a capacity, an ability which transcends all our natural ability in this matter. Do you sometimes feel your limitations in understanding divine things, and despair? This is not for such as have great natural capacity for grasping and understanding; the Spirit is for the child of God, whoever that child may be, learned or unlearned. It is just this, "*if so be that the Spirit of Christ dwells in us*". There is a capacity by the indwelling Spirit for what the greatest minds and brains without the Holy Spirit can never grasp.

Now John says: "*I was in the Spirit... and I heard*". What did he hear? Well, the things that have defeated and defied all natural attempts to interpret and explain. He heard and he saw. You and I, if we have the Spirit, have a capacity for a life with the Lord in knowledge and understanding that lifts us on to a level that is above the best equipment apart from the Holy Spirit.

Now, in all this, so hurriedly and imperfectly given, there is a challenge. Probably you have sensed the challenge. The Lord Jesus may be present in

people: He may be present in gatherings; He may be present with intent to make Himself known, to reveal Himself, to come into touch with us, with all that that means, and we may miss it all because we are not in the Spirit!

Now the quite evident challenge is this: we must get adjusted with the Spirit. As we face each day we must ask the Lord that we may enter the day, and remain through the day, in the Spirit, for we never know when it is going to be 'the Lord's Day', a Lord's Day in this sense, when the Lord Jesus has something to say of vital consequence. When we come, or face coming to the Lord's people in gatherings, do we not need to get adjusted, that we come 'in the Spirit'? Then we shall not just come to a place and meet people, but, if He is there, we meet Him at once, and He meets us at once, and there is contact at once with the Lord. But we can come and go and miss everything if we are not 'in the Spirit'. Oh, I do feel that so much hangs upon this, whether we are in life adjusted to the Holy Spirit. A knowledge of the Lord Jesus depends upon that.